

## Pedagogy for Freedom: Interpretation of Henry Giroux's Critical Pedagogy

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Doi: 10.23918/ijsses.v12i3p13

**Abstract:** Education has always been a fundamental concern among philosophers and scholars, evolving significantly with the advent of new schools of thought, such as pragmatism and postmodernism. In the postmodern era, the emergence of critical thinking in education has become particularly crucial. Henry Giroux, a prominent contemporary theorist of postmodernism, advocates for an educational framework where politics, ethics, and culture are central. This study examines Giroux's critical pedagogy, specifically focusing on its implications for educational goals and principles and the roles of teachers and students. Through a descriptive-analytical method, the research explores key concepts like "liberatory pedagogy" and "border pedagogy," highlighting how Giroux's ideas challenge traditional educational practices and promote a curriculum that empowers students as active, engaged citizens. This paper contributes to the discourse on educational reform by demonstrating how critical pedagogy can act as a catalyst for social change.

**Keywords:** Critical Theory; Pedagogical Implications; Pedagogical Goals; Pedagogical Principles; Henry Giroux

### 1. Introduction

Every society requires an education system that is aligned with its cultural patterns and the life needs of its generation to manage its affairs effectively. Such a system not only facilitates the effective management of societal affairs but also fosters progress across cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions. The education system has always been a matter of concern and importance from the perspective of philosophers and experts. A review of the philosophical and educational views of these scholars shows that each, depending on their perspective and the prevailing culture and politics of their society, has proposed various theories in the field of education. Examining these theories provides valuable guidelines for policymakers to transform the educational infrastructure of their societies. However, educational policies must emphasize significant change, transformation, and innovation to ensure that education remains a dynamic and vital element in meeting societal needs.

The transition from traditional educational theories to critical pedagogy marks a significant shift in how education is perceived and implemented. Traditional theories often focus on the transmission of established knowledge and cultural norms.

Received: 17.11.2024

Accepted: 14.08.2025

Seyyedi, keivan. (2025). Pedagogy for Freedom: Interpretation of Henry Giroux's Critical Pedagogy. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 12(3), 13-23.

In contrast, critical pedagogy emphasizes transformation, change, innovation, and creativity, challenging the status quo and promoting a more engaged and reflective educational practice. This transition is particularly evident in the works of postmodern thinkers such as Richard Rorty, McCarthy, Henry Giroux, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault, who have introduced new ideas that have significantly influenced various fields, including education (Rorty, 1979; Giroux, 1988). For instance, the ideas of these thinkers, especially Henry Giroux, have played a crucial role in advocating for a critical approach to education that goes beyond mere acceptance and indoctrination.

This paper aims to explore Henry Giroux's Critical Pedagogy and its implications for educational goals and practices. The primary objective is to provide an in-depth analysis of Giroux's theory and highlight how his ideas can inform and transform contemporary educational practices. The paper is structured as follows:

**Analysis of Giroux's critical pedagogy:** This section examines the core principles of Giroux's theory, exploring his unique perspectives on education and their broader implications.

**Implications for educational goals:** The second section analyzes how Giroux's critical theory can reshape educational objectives, focusing on fostering critical thinking, social justice, and active participation in the learning process.

**Principles of education based on critical theory:** The final section outlines specific educational principles derived from Giroux's critical theory, emphasizing the roles of teachers and students in the educational process.

## **2. Henry Giroux's Critical Pedagogy Theory**

The history of "Critical Theory" dates back to the establishment of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1924. Researchers at this institute, including influential figures like Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, and later, Henry Giroux, developed Critical Theory intending to emancipate society from hegemonic relationships and exploitation (Garlitz & Zompetti, 2021).

Critical Theorists argue that dominant groups in society impose their beliefs on weaker groups to secure their interests through political, economic, and cultural exploitation. They believe that education is essential for liberating societies from these oppressive structures. Concepts such as "liberatory pedagogy," "radical pedagogy," and "revolutionary pedagogy" reflect their efforts to apply critical theory in education (O'Mahony, 2023). Max Horkheimer criticized the late capitalist system, political totalitarianism, and the destruction of individuality, advocating for changes in social relationships through insightful analyses.

Giroux (2019) contends that universities should go beyond vocational training and foster critical thinking to cultivate young people with democratic citizenship ethics. He views education as a political process aimed at creating an egalitarian, democratic society. Critical education, according to Giroux, should connect public education with the needs of such a society and emphasize ethics as a primary concern (Giroux, 2010).

To illustrate Giroux's ideas, consider his concept of "border pedagogy." This approach challenges traditional educational goals and seeks to create an environment where marginalized groups can express their opinions and challenge the dominance of the prevailing culture. For instance, in practice, border pedagogy might involve inclusive classroom discussions that allow students from diverse backgrounds to share their perspectives, fostering a more democratic and culturally responsive education system.

Giroux's ideas build on Paulo Freire's "liberatory pedagogy" by emphasizing the role of education in fostering critical consciousness among students. While Freire focused on the oppressed's ability to perceive and challenge their conditions, Giroux extends this by addressing how educational institutions themselves can become sites of resistance against cultural domination (Freire, 2017). Giroux diverges from Freire by placing a stronger emphasis on the role of educators as cultural workers who actively challenge the hidden curriculum and the implicit values it perpetuates.

Compared to Jürgen Habermas, who introduced the concept of communicative action as a means of achieving mutual understanding and rational consensus, Giroux emphasizes the political nature of education. While Habermas's theory is rooted in dialogue and consensus-building (Habermas, 1984), Giroux focuses more on conflict and the necessity of challenging dominant cultural narratives. This approach reflects a more activist stance, advocating for education that not only fosters dialogue but also equips students to actively resist and transform oppressive structures.

Giroux emphasizes the concept of "dominance" in critical theory, highlighting how dominant classes propagate their beliefs through institutions like schools, families, and media. He critiques the hidden and formal layers of control within curricula, urging curriculum designers to address these covert influences (Giroux, 1979). Proponents like Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren advocate for critical education that empowers individuals to recognize and combat injustice, promoting freedom and justice. Giroux, along with Freire and McLaren, advocates for critical education that empowers individuals to recognize and combat injustice, promoting freedom and justice.

Critical theorists raise questions about curriculum design, educational goals, and school control. They argue that educational content often reflects the power dynamics of society, where dominant groups impose their views on knowledge and curriculum (Guttek, 2008). For example, textbooks might present historical events from a biased perspective, favoring the dominant culture while marginalizing others.

The curriculum should reflect the historical and social culture of a society, but it must also be scrutinized for power imbalances that favor certain groups. Freire (2017) emphasized that schools embody collective attitudes influenced by broader socio-economic processes. From this perspective, re-examining the relationship between schools and society is crucial for understanding how ideologies and political influences shape education.

Giroux argues for a critical pedagogy that views educators as cultural agents and transformative thinkers with political and social roles. Such educators should provide equal opportunities for all students to express their interests and thoughts, fostering an environment of critical engagement and intellectual growth. For instance, teachers might encourage students to critically analyze media representations and discuss how these influence societal perceptions (McLaren, 2015).

In summary, Giroux's critical theory of education focuses on political education, cultural studies, and ethical considerations. He calls for a critique and reconstruction of traditional, hidden, and informal curricula. Giroux advocates for education that reproduces cultural elements and instigates new knowledge, emphasizing the importance of linguistic diversity and the inclusion of various voices. This approach ensures that education provides a space for listening to diverse perspectives, fostering a more democratic and inclusive society.

### **3. Giroux's Critical Pedagogy Goals**

In critical pedagogy, schools should educate citizens who can effectively manage their lives, particularly in creating new knowledge and having the power and control over it. To achieve the goals of Giroux's critical pedagogy, concepts such as power, critique, democratic society, and emancipation should be explored.

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, educators can implement Giroux's goals through specific actions:

1. Curriculum design: Incorporate project-based learning where students investigate and address real-world social issues, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving (Freire, 2017).
2. Classroom discussions: Facilitate debates and discussions on current social and political topics to develop students' critical consciousness and ability to engage in democratic dialogue (Hooks, 1994).
3. Teacher roles: Train teachers to act as facilitators rather than authoritative figures, promoting a classroom environment where students feel empowered to share their perspectives and challenge existing narratives ((McLaren, 2015).
4. Student engagement: Encourage students to take on leadership roles in school activities and community projects, fostering a sense of agency and responsibility (Hooks, 1994).

Comparing Giroux's goals with those of other educational theorists highlights the unique aspects of his approach:

**Paulo Freire:** Like Giroux, Freire emphasized the importance of education as a tool for liberation and empowerment. Both theorists advocate for a dialogical approach where education is a collaborative process between teachers and students. However, Freire's focus on the "pedagogy of the oppressed" is more centered on the conditions of the impoverished and illiterate in developing countries, whereas Giroux extends this to a broader range of social and political issues in diverse contexts (Freire, 2017).

**John Dewey:** Dewey also championed education for democratic citizenship, advocating for experiential learning and the development of critical thinking skills (Dewey, 1938). While Dewey emphasized the role of education in fostering democracy, Giroux places a stronger emphasis on challenging power structures and addressing social injustices.

**Howard Gardner:** Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences suggests that education should cater to diverse learning styles and intelligences (Gardner, 2011). While this approach aligns with Giroux's goal of recognizing diverse perspectives, Giroux's critical pedagogy specifically seeks to address and dismantle systemic inequalities.

From Giroux's perspective, critical education goals encompass cultivating citizens with a vital mindset rather than fostering compliance. It focuses on social and political issues across diverse ethnic, racial, and class groups. The aim is to assist in dismantling political dominance over marginalized groups, acknowledging their rights, and eliminating racial discrimination. The broader vision extends to defending the rights of oppressed groups, fostering an egalitarian and ethical democratic society. The transformation involves changing curriculum content and restructuring objectives and methods. Redefining the roles of teachers is crucial, guiding them to contribute to societal changes actively. Similarly, students' roles are to be reconceptualized, shifting from passive acceptance to active and creative engagement (Giroux, 2010).

#### **4. Giroux's Critical Pedagogy Principles**

Based on Giroux's critical theory, the following educational principles can be extracted as a guide for educators in cultivating an essential spirit for learners:

##### **4.1 Emphasis on Critique and Criticism**

One of the definite principles that educators can use based on Giroux's critical theory in the education process is the principle of critique and criticism. According to this educational principle, both the educator and the learner, in educational interactions, should approach what is presented to them with a critical perspective. Giroux believes that cultural agents and teachers must transcend cultural boundaries to analyze and critique the existing social order and cultural and political boundaries and propose rethinking this domain (Giroux, 1985). This issue can also be considered in the context of the content of educational materials from the perspective of teachers and students. In other words, teachers and students should look at what is read or learned with an analytical and critical view.

From an evaluative perspective, the educator should not merely consider the students' memorization when assessing their learning achievements. Instead, specific teaching strategies, such as incorporating analytical questions and promoting discussions that encourage critique and criticism, should be employed. Therefore, the educator should never expect students to accept teachers' teachings passively, and students should not remain silent about teachers' perspectives. Challenging teachers' beliefs, the content of textbooks, values, and even the educational policies governing schools should be among the most critical issues of this educational principle from the perspective of all teachers, students, managers, and curriculum planners.

##### **4.2 Emphasis on Discourse**

Dialogue has been critical in the traditional education system and schools of criticism and postmodernism. In these systems, discussion, and group discussion methods have been considered in the education process. In Giroux's critical education, discourse holds significant importance. The thinkers of critical theory believe that knowledge, values, and attitudes are clarified better through the discourse method. In critical education, teachers are considered liberating intellectuals, cultural agents, critique-oriented intellectuals, and transformative figures characterized by moral courage and criticism. They create conditions that allow self-reflection, recognize oppressive relationships, and provide ways to address them (Giroux, 2010).

Dialogue is a method through which students and educators connect using verbal and non-verbal language (symbols and images) and influence each other. Effective dialogue can establish social and intellectual relationships between learners and educators by creating a shared space and fostering mutual understanding (Šimšíková, 2024).

To operationalize this principle, educators should incorporate various forms of dialogue and discussion into their educational practices, ensuring all students can participate and reflect on diverse issues. One of the concepts discussed in Giroux's critical perspective is "Pedagogy of Voice." The concept of voice here refers to how students generate meanings through various mental positions available to them in society. This concept emphasizes the participation of students in constructing social meanings. The idea of voice concerns analyzing why the ruling system silences some cultures and does not allow them to speak. Pedagogy of voice enables all groups in educational institutions and curricula to be heard, eliminating power imbalances (Giroux, 1988). According to this principle, educators must incorporate dialogue and discussion into their educational practices and create various forms of participation for all students, regardless of race or class, to promote reflection and present diverse issues.

#### **4.3 Anti-Authority and Dominance**

Another essential principle of Giroux's critical education is paying attention to the rights of all people and students in the class. According to this principle, the teacher does not have the right to rule over the students' class, ideas, and thoughts. Critical education is trying to fight with the authority of domination.

In practice, this principle requires modifying the classroom environment and teaching methods to reduce hierarchical structures. For example, the traditional classroom setup can be replaced with a round table format to facilitate direct interaction between all students and the teacher. The position of the teacher in the classroom needs to be very different from its current form. For direct interaction between all students and the teacher, it is natural that the classroom space needs to change from the traditional form to a new modern form, namely the round table. From the perspective of this school, the student-centered class is a place where social interactions, critiques, research, problem-solving, analysis, and the possibility of experiencing various learning styles are facilitated. "Giroux believes that students must understand the strengths and richness of different cultural traditions and various voices. They must actively learn to participate in political, critical, and ethical discussions" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991).

Critical pedagogy is a practical approach to teaching, learning, and research emphasizing critical discourse and dialectical analysis of daily experiences. Educators must be prepared to navigate the challenges of reducing traditional authority roles while still maintaining effective classroom management and learning outcomes. In summary, critical education focuses on teaching with attention to necessary action. Its democratic approach aims to create and establish economic and social equality and justice for all ethnic and racial groups and genders (Foley et al., 2015).

#### **4.4 Relativity of Knowledge and Understanding**

Another principle from Giroux's critical perspective is the change in knowledge, values, and insights. This principle can be called the principle of relativity of knowledge and understanding. According to this principle, knowledge and experience can never be considered absolute. The critical approach to the content of the educational program disrupts the emergence of new knowledge and insights. It is the essential duty of teachers and students to critique previous knowledge and critically inspect and recreate it. Critical education must create unique images of knowledge by emphasizing the collapse of disciplinary boundaries and creating new spaces for knowledge production. In this sense, critical education must be revived as a political and cultural act of anti-memory (McLaren, 1988).

According to this principle, students and teachers should never accept knowledge as specific. Instead, knowledge and understanding are social and temporary matters. A statement is only considered correct if it provides a better justification for phenomena, while more accurate statements give way to new statements. As Giroux also points out, critical education must create unique images of knowledge by emphasizing the collapse of disciplinary boundaries and creating new spaces for knowledge production. Critical education must be revived as a political-cultural and anti-memory act (Cahoone, 2003).

Considering that the mere transfer of knowledge is nothing more than accumulating the student's mind with old knowledge, educators in critical education must refrain from transferring knowledge as an accumulation of information. Some critical theorists, such as Freire (2017), criticize the role of traditional teachers as mere knowledge transmitters and students as passive recipients of information. Freire characterizes this system as banking education. Heyman (2001) sees the result of this educational approach as students who, like empty ships, accumulate their storerooms but will never gain the ability to move and transfer these goods. Students educated in traditional methods will not acquire the ability to transfer knowledge and critical thinking by just acquiring knowledge. Such an objective view of knowledge leads to a fixed worldview. In this situation, the only thing that can be expected from the student is to adapt himself to the existing situation.

To address potential challenges in applying these principles, educators should critically reflect on the practical difficulties they may encounter, such as resistance from traditional educational systems or the challenge of balancing critical pedagogy with standardized testing requirements.

## **5. Roles of Teachers and Students from Giroux's Critical Pedagogy Perspective**

Although Giroux did not directly explain the role of teacher and student, by studying his works, implicit roles for teachers and students in critical education can be extracted.

### **5.1 Characteristics of Teachers**

#### **5.1.1 Critically Transformative**

One of the characteristics of teachers based on Giroux's critical theory is being "critically transformative." Giroux divides teachers into "critically transformative" and "accommodating." The first group endures various roles and pressures, while the second group gains promotions and rewards. Giroux regards teachers as intellectuals with fascinating social and political positions. The role of teachers is not to adhere to

abstract ideals that keep them away from everyday life, but these cultural agents have to shoulder social criticism (Giroux, 2019).

In the book "Teachers as Intellectuals" (1985), Giroux seeks to explain a type of critical education that considers educators as cultural agents and transformative thinkers with specific political and social roles. Critical education, instead of defining the role of teachers in terms of specialized and technical language, sheds light on their role as intellectuals and cultural agents who produce more suitable ideologies and social functions.

### **5.1.2 Respecting the Opinions and Beliefs of All Students**

The second characteristic of a teacher is respect for the opinions and beliefs of students from all groups, races, and social classes. Teachers adhering to the critical pedagogy school cannot allow themselves to be biased. These teachers can critique opposing views and enable students to defend their ideas without biases.

Apple (1978) believes that advocating for equality as the central theme of critical education is only possible if each individual understands the unequal economic, cultural, and political dynamics. To change the structure, every person must be informed about what constitutes inequality and oppression.

Critical theorists strive to reform schools based on their critiques so that schools become public and democratic spaces, allowing the younger generation to open their perspectives to genuine ethical, political, economic, and civic rights and responsibilities (Gutek, 2008).

### **5.1.3 Self-Growth and Creativity in Reconstruction of Self and Others**

Due to having insight and a positive attitude toward all peers, the critical teacher can reconstruct it in line with his professional growth and help students use their creativity in self-transformation. In critical education, teacher training is emphasized. Although there is no practical guide for critical teacher training, three approaches are inherent in critical education. These approaches, which culminate the views of critical theorists such as Giroux, McLaren, Delpit, and Dillard, are as follows: First, self-discovery and growth are deeply intertwined with reflection through culture and personal life experiences. This approach, influenced by critical theorists, acknowledges the profound impact of cultural background and individual histories on shaping one's worldview. Second, developing a meaningful voice is emphasized through a critical lens applied to personal and social realms, evolving through dynamic conversations with others. The insights of critical theorists underscore the importance of fostering a perspective that engages critically with the world, enriching individual voices. Finally, these approaches contribute to societal change to achieve equality for all citizens through active participation in democratic necessities (Perry, 2009).

### **5.1.4 Adequate knowledge of Current Issues**

Another characteristic of teachers, based on Giroux's critical perspective, is being up-to-date and aware of potential dangers in societies, especially their understanding of issues affecting youth in schools. Teachers' unawareness of current knowledge and potential risks can hinder their ability to guide students in making informed choices. Teachers with up-to-date knowledge can raise awareness among students about the possible dangers of drugs, improper use of cyberspace, and issues related to sexual relations through holding workshops and seminars at school. A teacher with insufficient knowledge of these issues will not successfully educate a critical citizen.

## **5.2 Characteristics of Students**

### **5.2.1 Ability and Courage to Ask Questions**

Based on Giroux's perspective, students' most important characteristics are courage and boldness in asking questions in all educational areas. Such students are not passive and inquire about ambiguous points when faced with new learning situations. A question is asked whose purpose is to enlighten the thoughts of oneself and other classmates, and it is far from childish mockery and mischief.

### **5.2.2 Active Participation in Socio-Political Affairs**

Another characteristic of students is sensitivity to political and social issues in the societies in which they live. The school is a small example of society. Freire writes, "Schools are not absolutely and precisely separate from society. In fact, schools embody collective attitudes that have penetrated the educational structure" (Freire, 2017). Instilling political, ethical, social, and even economic ideas regarding their societal issues in the student body prepares them for active participation in community matters.

Such students play a crucial role in societal reconstruction. The cultural conditions of the school and the diversity of cultures and subcultures facilitate active participation in political and social issues. This can easily be achieved through teaching history and social sciences, especially in Iranian schools. Therefore, "students with different identities should express their culture and history with hope and language, allowing them to engage in dialogue with each other and practice openness and respect for different cultures in the school environment" (Fecho & Clifton, 2016).

### **5.2.3 Efforts for Educational Reforms in School**

Students must play a significant role in educational reforms in schools. By raising questions such as: "Does the curriculum address their needs? Is it necessary for teachers to reconsider their roles?" in educational forums, roundtables, and school conferences, they contribute to problem-solving and revisiting their educational issues. According to Giroux's critical perspective, one of the characteristics of students should be paying attention to educational reforms and making efforts to strengthen these reforms in all educational matters.

### **5.2.4 Having a Logical Critique of Spirit**

Possessing a critical spirit is a concept introduced previously among philosophers and intellectuals. Although critical thinking emerged in the 20th century, the emphasis on the necessity of cultivating a critical spirit can be observed in the thoughts of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Confucius, as well as leaders of Indian priests in the East. It can be concluded that the roots of critical education lie in critical thinking.

Therefore, according to Giroux (2010), one of the characteristics of critical education students is having a logical critique spirit. Through analytical critiques, students can contribute to developing their critical spirit. This can aid in their liberation, as suggested by Freire and Habermas, and in nurturing critical citizens, as suggested by Giroux. Based on this, students should not unquestioningly accept any ideologies and should not become instruments for the dominance and authority of interest groups. Students can only take or reject ideas after logical criticism and exploration of new ideas received from teachers and their environment.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

Critical theory has significantly evolved within cultural, political, and educational discourses in recent decades. Despite facing criticisms, its influence on education and training warrants careful consideration. Giroux's educational perspective, like other theories, presents both strengths and limitations, yet it has profoundly impacted diverse fields such as cultural analysis and educational critique.

Similar to other critical theorists like McLaren, Giroux's educational viewpoints have undergone notable transformations. Despite criticisms, critical theory's implications in education have been explored. Further research is recommended to deepen the understanding of Giroux's critical theory, particularly its implications within educational curricula, and to compare it with the perspectives of other theorists such as McLaren. Such comparative analysis promises to illuminate the educational implications of critical theory, providing valuable insights for educators and educational practitioners to critically reassess both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in education.

In conclusion, notwithstanding practical challenges in implementation, Giroux's critical educational perspective stands to significantly contribute to educational reform efforts and the cultivation of critical citizenship. Thorough exploration and comparison with other critical theories can further elucidate its educational implications, benefiting researchers, educators, and policymakers involved in shaping educational practices.

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